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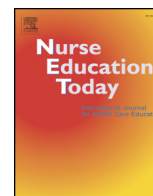
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## The effect of a career activity on the students' perception of the nursing profession and their career plan: A single-group experimental study



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### SUMMARY

**Background:** Students' conceptualizations of nursing and their reasons for choosing the profession motivate them and affect their education, work performance and career plans. Nursing educators should support them to plan their careers consciously during their education.

**Objectives:** The study aimed to investigate the effect of career-planning event for nursing students on their conceptualizations of the nursing profession and their career plans.

**Design:** The study was as single-group experimental study using a pre-test and post-test.

**Settings:** The career-planning event was held in the conference hall of the university involved in the current study, and was open to the all students of the nursing school.

**Participants:** The sample of the study consisted of 105 students who participated in the "Nursing Career Symposium" held on 27 March 2015.

#### Methods

At the event, the importance of career planning and the opportunities of the nursing profession was presented. The data were collected using a questionnaire consisted of two sections including descriptive characteristics and the opinions of the students regarding their career plans and Perception of Nursing Profession Scale. The students completed the first section of the questionnaire before the career event began and the second section of the questionnaire and scale both before and after the event.

**Results:** The participants had positive conceptualizations of the profession. Following a career event, the participants' opinions of professional qualities and professional status as measured through the Perception of Nursing Profession Scale showed a significant increase, and that the event had made an important contribution to their career plans.

**Conclusions:** In the light of these results, it is possible to suggest that such events have an important place during education in that they introduce the nursing profession, and they develop the students' positive thoughts regarding the profession in terms of both course content and teaching methodology.

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### Introduction

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) defines nursing as a profession which encompasses both the autonomous and collaborative care of individuals, families, groups and communities who are either sick or well in all settings. Nursing also includes the prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. Key nursing roles also include advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research,

training, contribution to the shaping of health policies and participation in the administration of health systems (The International Council of Nurses, 2015). With these important roles and responsibilities, nurses have an irreplaceable role in health services. However, these roles and responsibilities are not well-known by either society or those students who have chosen or are thinking of choosing to study at Departments of Nursing (Andsoy et al., 2012; Güdücü Tüfekçi and Yıldız, 2009; Şirin et al., 2008). It is generally narrowly assumed that nurses have limited responsibilities, such as taking blood, measuring blood pressure, administering medicine (Sis Çelik et al., 2013). Moreover, nursing is generally conceived of as a female profession, and nurses are viewed as doctors' assistants and as non-autonomous individuals who are dependent on others in their use of professional and academic knowledge (Brodie et al., 2004).

Despite the insufficient knowledge of the wide roles and responsibilities of nurses and the misconceptions regarding the nursing profession, some students autonomously choose to enter the nursing profession

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because they like working with people and helping others. Yet others choose to enter the profession for economic reasons, job guarantee, because the nursing school is close to their home, because they could not be placed on another program or because of recommendations of parents, friends and nurses they know (Andsoy et al., 2012; Güdücü Tüfekçi and Yıldız, 2009; Jirwe and Rudman, 2012; Mooney et al., 2008; Şirin et al., 2008). Students' conceptualizations of nursing and their reasons for choosing the profession motivate them throughout their education and working life, and also work performance and career plans. Çitlik Sarıtaş et al. (2014) stated that the intentions to stay in the profession were high in students whose reasons for choosing nursing and whose conceptualizations of the professional image were also high.

The current literature on the nursing career plans of students appears to be limited (Rognstad et al., 2004; (Arslan et al., 2013; Çınar Yücel et al., 2011; Yildirim et al., 2011)). In the studies, it has been shown that students do not have any knowledge about career planning (Arslan et al., 2013), and that they are worried about employment (Güdücü Tüfekçi and Yıldız, 2009; Kızgüt and Ergöl, 2011; Shoqirat and Abu-Qamar, 2015). However, nursing is a profession that holds many employment possibilities. Following technological developments and improvements in the health services, there have been rapid changes and new opportunities for employment in the nursing profession. Graduates of nursing departments can find employment in public/private hospitals, outpatient clinics, medical centers, rehabilitation centers, rest homes, care homes, dialysis units, infertility centers, drug companies or various training centers. According to their interest areas and skills, graduates can take on the various positions of clinical nurse, special branch nurse (e.g., oncology nurse, diabetes-training nurse), administrative nurse, trainer nurse, home care nurse, and occupational health or school nurse. Alternatively, they can continue their postgraduate studies and take on academic posts (Aydın Özkan and Geçkil, 2015). Despite this wide range of opportunities, a majority of students are not aware of the career possibilities of the nursing profession, and only realize that they can develop their careers once they have gained some professional experience. Furthermore, when nurses who have just entered employment after graduation work in areas that they would otherwise not prefer, due to their not being able to plan their careers according to their personal interests and skills, it has been observed that their work satisfaction decreases, and that they suffer burnout after a short time or they leave the profession entirely (Beecroft et al., 2008).

However, career planning is a strategic approach that begins with career choice and needs to be developed during education. Nursing educators should help students to realize the career opportunities related to the nursing profession and support them to plan their careers consciously during their education (Göz and Gürbüz, 2005).

In the light of this knowledge, a "Nursing Career Symposium" was organized at the nursing school involved in the current study with the aim of informing the students about the concepts of career, career planning, and the opportunities of the nursing profession. Hence, the aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of this career-planning event for nursing students on their conceptualizations of the nursing career and their career plans.

## Methods

### *Design, sample and setting*

The current study was designed as single-group experimental study using a pre-test and post-test. The population of the study consisted of the 129 student nurses who participated in the "Nursing Career Symposium" held on 27 March 2015. The sample consisted of the 105 nursing students who participated voluntarily in the study and responded to the research instrument completely. The career symposium was held in the conference hall of the university involved in the current study, and was open to the all students of the nursing school. At the event, the academic

staff of the nursing department presented the importance of career planning and the opportunities of the nursing profession. This was followed by talks given by leaders in the clinical, academic, and private enterprise areas of nursing about how they planned their own careers, and presentations by hospital representatives who wanted to work with nursing students.

### *Instruments*

The data were gathered by means of a questionnaire and Perception of Nursing Profession Scale (PNPS).

### *The questionnaire*

It consisted of two sections that were developed by the researchers following a review of the literature (Çınar Yücel et al., 2011; Jirwe and Rudman, 2012; Kızgüt and Ergöl, 2011; Kloster et al., 2007; Yildirim et al., 2011). The first section of the questionnaire consisted of 15 questions regarding socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, year of study, place of residence, education level and income of parents), career choice (career chosen voluntarily, person effective in the choice of career, the order of preference of the nursing department, members of family in the health profession).

The second section included eight questions regarding the participants' opinions about career planning, participating in research on nursing, experiencing employment problems after graduation, postgraduate education, membership to nursing associations after graduation and the field of work.

### *Perception of Nursing Profession Scale (PNPS)*

This is a five-point Likert-type scale of 22 items designed by Eser and her colleagues to measure the conceptualizations of nursing students regarding the nursing profession (Çınar Yücel et al., 2011). It consists of two subgroups: "professional qualities" (17 items) and "professional status" (five items). The former includes such aspects as "intense nursing communication," "requiring sacrifice," "based on knowledge and skills," "satisfying," "tiring," "stressful," "heavy work conditions," "independent practices," "team work," "use of technology," "use of problem solving skills," "requiring higher education," and "based on science." The latter includes "the place of nursing among the other health professions," "prestige" and "the place of the profession in society." The highest possible score for the whole instrument is 110, and the lowest is 22. The highest score for the "professional qualities" dimension (17 items) is 85, and the lowest is 17. For the "professional status" dimension (five items), the highest possible score is 25 while the lowest is five. A high score suggests a positive career conceptualization. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  in the original study was .83 (Çınar Yücel et al., 2011), and in the current study, it was calculated as .74, which suggests an acceptable internal reliability. Factor analysis was used to describe variability among items of the scale. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value for this analysis was .81. According to the principal component analysis, two factors emerged. The items in the first factor explained 34.3% of the variance; while the items in the second factor were 11.3%. The items loading to first factor were 1., 3., 4., 5., 9., 10., 11., 13., 14., 15., 16., 17., 18., 19., 20., and 21. Thus, the first factor represented the "professional qualities" dimension, and second factor the "professional status" dimension.

### *Data collection procedure*

After explaining the aim of the study, the researchers distributed the first section of the questionnaire to volunteers before the career event began, and the second section of the questionnaire and PNPS both before and after the event. It took approximately 15–20 min for the participants to complete the instruments.

### Ethical considerations

Oral and written permission was obtained from all the participants, and written permission was granted by the authors of the data collection instrument.

### Limitations

The pre-test post-test design of the study and the fact that the event was an eight-hour whole day event consisted the limitations of the current study. The study was conducted at a single nursing school, and sample size being small might have prevented the generalizability of results. Moreover, the content of the symposium cannot be replicated.

### Data analysis

The data were analyzed on a computer using SPSS version 20.0. Specifically, skewness and kurtosis tests were applied to check for the normal distribution of the continuous variables, and frequency and percentages were calculated for the categorical variables. Because the variables did not show normal distribution, the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed ranks test and Chi-square test were conducted. Significance was taken as  $p < .05$ .

### Results

This section presents the socio-demographic and career choice information about the participants, the pre-test and post-test results of the PNPS, and the opinions of the participants regarding career planning.

A majority of the participants were female, had graduated from high schools other than health vocational high schools and 34.3% were first-year students. 66.7% stated that they lived in a city and a majority stated that their family income “was equal to their expenditure” (Table 1).

72.3% of the participants had willingly selected the nursing profession, 55.2% stated that they had made the selection themselves, 84.8% stated that they had placed the nursing profession in the top three of their choices on the university selection form, and 71.4% reported that none of their family members were working in the health sector (Table 2).

**Table 1**  
Socio-demographic characteristics of the students

Gender	n	%
Female	96	91.4
Male	9	8.6
Year of study		
Year 1	36	34.3
Year 2	30	28.6
Year 3	18	17.1
Year 4	21	20.0
Education level		
High school	34	32.4
Anatolian high school	39	37.1
Health vocational high school	16	15.2
Foreign language oriented high school	3	2.9
Other	13	12.4
Place of residence		
Village	10	9.5
County	25	23.8
City	70	66.7
Income of parents		
Income less than expenditure	11	10.5
Income equal to expenditure	82	78.1
Income more than expenditure	12	11.4

**Table 2**  
Career choice characteristics of the students.

Career chosen voluntarily	n	%
Yes	72	72.7
No	27	27.3
Person effective in the choice of career		
Own choice	58	55.2
Parents	37	35.2
Teachers	7	6.7
Friends	2	1.9
Other	1	1.0
The order of preference of the nursing department		
First preference	68	64.8
Second preference	11	10.5
Third preference	9	8.6
Fourth preference	6	5.1
Other	11	10.5
Members of family in the health profession		
Yes	30	28.6
No	75	71.4

The results of the Wilcoxon signed ranks test for the pre-test and post-test application of the PNPS show that there was a significant and positive difference in the results of the “professional qualities” subgroup ( $Z = -4.193$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the “professional status” subgroup ( $Z = -5.927$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the whole scale ( $Z = -5.897$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in favor of the post-test. The scores in the current study were close to the maximum scores of the two subgroups and the whole scale (Table 3).

A statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) was found between the pre-test and post-test results in favor of the latter in terms of the participants' knowledge about career planning, having career plans, the desire to participate in research on nursing, thinking that they would not experience any problems finding employment after graduation, and the desire to continue in postgraduate education (Table 4).

According to the results of the post-test, 40% of the participants reported that they would like to work as specialist nurses, 23.8% as academics, and 16.2% as administrative nurses. A statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) was found between the pre-test and post-test results in favor of the latter in terms of the fields in which the participants wanted to work (Table 5).

### Discussion

According to the findings of the current study, three-quarters of the participants reported that they had chosen the nursing profession willingly. Moreover, over half of the participants stated that their first choice had been the nursing profession, although none of their family members was employed in the health sector. The studies conducted in Turkey showed that the frequency of giving first preference to the nursing profession has increased (Çitlik Sarıtaş et al., 2014; Kızıgüt and Ergöl, 2011; Sabancıoğulları and Doğan, 2012). In recent years, students have been willingly choosing the nursing profession for a number of reasons, including ease of finding employment, wanting to help others, and an interest in the profession (Güdücü Tüfekçi and Yıldız, 2009; Kızıgüt and Ergöl, 2011).

Factors such as the recent increase in private hospitals, an increase in the possibility of employment in the state sector and because it provides a good income have all worked to making the nursing profession more attractive. Moreover, postgraduate education opportunities have increased, societies' needs have changed because of globalization, and just as with other sectors, there have been fast developments in the health sector. All these have led to the bringing of the concept of care onto the agenda, and thus the nursing profession has become a much sought after and necessary career. The fact that students have chosen the profession voluntarily and have given it high preference appears

**Table 3**  
Perception of Nursing Profession Scale points and relation between pre-test and post-test.

The mean of scale points	Pre-test–post-test	n	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Z	p
Professional qualities	Negative ranks	24	37.46	899.00	-4.193	0.001
Pre-test X: 71.26 ± 8.90	Positive ranks	62	45.84	2842.00		
Post-test X: 75.00 ± 7.02	Ties	19				
Professional status	Negative ranks	13	28.58	371.50	-5.927	0.001
Pre-test X: 21.41 ± 2.80	Positive ranks	66	42.25	2788.50		
Post-test X: 22.31 ± 2.63	Ties	26				
Total of scale points	Negative ranks	16	30.19	483.00	-5.897	0.001
Pre-test X: 92.68 ± 10.82	Positive ranks	69	45.97	3172.00		
Post-test X: 92.71 ± 8.54	Ties	20				

to be important in terms of their career planning. Moreover, this finding could be explained in terms of the students' positive conceptualizations of the nursing profession. In the study, although the pre-test and post-test results of the participants' total PNPS scores did not show a statistically significant difference, there was significant differences for those between the subgroups of professional qualities and professional status (Table 3). The reasons for this could be because the participants were able to become familiar with the various career possibilities of the nursing profession and be influenced by the approaches to nursing displayed by the career leaders during the career event.

In the present study, a statistically significant difference was found in favor of the post-test regarding having professional career plans, wanting to participate in research on nursing, thinking they will have no problems finding employment after graduation, and wanting to continue with postgraduate studies. Although it was not statistically significant, an increase was observed in the opinions of the participants regarding career planning after the event.

Nearly half of the participants wanted to work as a specialist nurse or staff nurse at any clinic, while the remaining half reported that they planned to have an academic career or to work in education, administration or health sector other than nursing. Other similar studies have shown differing results. For example, while some reported that students frequently planned to have an academic career, or to become administrative nurses or take part in education and administration (Akdolun Balkaya et al., 2014; Kloster et al., 2007; Nazik and Arslan, 2014; Patidar et al., 2011; Şirin et al., 2008; Yildirim et al., 2011), other studies reported that students generally planned to work as service nurses (Arslan et al., 2013; Çınar Yücel et al., 2011; Güdücü Tüfekçi and Yıldız, 2009). Although the students conceptualizations of the nursing profession were positive, the fact that they planned to work in areas other than the clinical field could be explained by the findings of studies by Şirin et al. (Şirin et al., 2008) and Nazik and Arslan (Nazik and Arslan, 2014), namely the insufficient number of nurses, negative working conditions, the image of the profession in society, the work load, lack of autonomy, the indefinite nature of the status in a team, and communication breakdowns.

In the present study, it was found that the participants preferred to work in fields such as infection and the operating room. Similar studies have shown that students prefer pediatrics, the operating room and gynecology–obstetrics clinics (Kloster et al., 2007; Yildirim et al., 2011). Toren et al. (2012) reported that students preferred hospitals to public health because of opportunities to learn and develop themselves, and pediatrics and gynecology–obstetric clinics to internal–surgical fields,

where the work was more intense. McCann et al. (McCann et al., 2010) found that junior students were undecided about their careers and that their career choices varied according to their theoretical and clinical experiences. The fact that students preferred fields such as pediatrics, gynecology–obstetrics, and the operating room to fields in which patients require more care, such as internal–surgical, oncology, geriatrics, and intensive care units or public health and psychiatry could be due to a number of factors. Specifically, factors such as salary, place of residence or the location of the hospital, personal areas of interest, working conditions, number of patients (Fenush and Hupcey, 2008; Neilson and McNally, 2010; Rogstad and Aasland, 2007; Shih and Chuang, 2008), the emergence of different career fields in nursing in parallel to technological developments, changing social conditions/values can influence the decisions that students make regarding their field of work. Furthermore, students generally have more interest in and want to work in areas in which they have had supportive, educative and positive experiences (Henderson et al., 2012). The approach of the teaching staff and the nurses is extremely important for the development of students' areas of personal interest during the clinical experiences throughout their education, especially the rich/varied environment of the internship in the final year of study (McKenna et al., 2010; Şentürk Erenel et al., 2008; Toren et al., 2012; Tseng et al., 2013).

In order to support students when they make decisions regarding their career expectations and plans, methods such as mentoring, peer and role models should be taken into consideration (Price, 2009; Vatan and Temel, 2012). Moreover, the fact that the current study reported a statistically significant difference in the areas in which the participants wanted to work following the career event suggests that it would be beneficial to organize such events and seminars. Trainers also have an important role in encouraging students to make career plans, and place should be given throughout education to topics such as what career planning is, how it is developed, and what the career opportunities are for nursing. Whether academic or clinical, students' career plans should be made before graduation. Students' areas of personal interest and skills should be determined, and the students should be supported to develop their careers in these directions.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings indicated that the participants had chosen to enter the nursing profession of their own accord, they had given high preference to the profession, and that they had positive

**Table 4**  
The students' opinions about career planning and differences between pre-test and post-test.

Opinions about career planning	Pre-test Yes		Post-test Yes		Chi-square $\chi^2$
	n	%	n	%	
I have knowledge on career planning.	39	37.1	100	95.2	$\chi^2$ : 3.102; p: .078
I have a career plan for my profession.	68	64.8	90	85.7	$\chi^2$ : 15.365; p: .001
To get married interfere my career.	44	41.9	40	38.1	$\chi^2$ : 24.845; p: .001
I want to participate in research on nursing.	97	92.4	97	92.4	$\chi^2$ : 22.099; p: .001
I think that I would not experience any problems finding employment after graduation.	70	66.7	74	70.5	$\chi^2$ : 44.307; p: .001
I want to continue in postgraduate education	75	71.4	84	80.0	$\chi^2$ : 23.625; p: .001

**Table 5**  
The students' career plans and differences between pre-test and post-test.

The students' career plans	Pre-test		Post-test		Chi-square $\chi^2$
	n	%	n	%	
Staff nurse at any clinic	9	8.6	7	6.7	$\chi^2$ : 233.657 p: .001
Specialist nurse	42	40.0	36	34.3	
Administrative nurse	17	16.2	13	12.4	
Academics	25	23.8	38	36.2	
Instructor in health vocational high school	10	9.5	8	7.6	
To work in health sector other than nursing	2	1.9	3	2.9	

conceptualizations of the profession. It was also observed that following a career event, the participants' opinions of professional qualities and professional status as measured through the PNPS showed a significant increase, and that the event had made an important contribution to their career plans. In the light of these results, it is possible to suggest that such events have an important place during education in that they introduce the nursing profession, and they develop the students' positive thoughts regarding the profession in terms of both course content and teaching methodology. Subject matters such as psychiatry, public health, gerontology or oncology should be emphasized in the nursing curriculum in order to increase the interest in these areas, and may be beneficial in the improvement of clinical experiences. In addition, it could be suggested that introducing career planning, informing about the importance of career planning, and bringing students together with successful, enterprising career leaders right from the first year of study would create positive professional experiences.

### Contributions

The study design was performed by A.I. and A.A.Y.; data collection, by G.E.Y. and U.Y.; data analysis, by A.A.Y., A.I., S.C.C., G.E.Y., and U.Y.; and article preparation, by A.A.Y., A.I., S.C.C., G.E.Y., and U.Y.

### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interests.

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